

## **WIND PROJECTS BUILDING MOMENTUM**

*By Karl Puckett*

CONRAD — A top executive with the owner of the state's largest wind farm — in the area to meet with landowners about leasing land — said Tuesday that the company is planning to build four to six additional wind farms in Montana.

Three of the preferred sites are located between Great Falls and the Canadian border.

Mark Jacobson, director of business development for Chicago-based Invenergy, said the company is so bullish on the state's wind potential, it recently hired Aaron Jones as a full-time employee to oversee the development of Montana projects.

Invenergy recently purchased 2,100 megawatts worth of wind turbines — a \$1 billion investment — for wind projects planned in the United States, including Montana.

The company also is planning an immediate 53-megawatt expansion at the 135-megawatt Judith Gap facility once it finds a buyer for the additional capacity, Jacobson said.

Jacobson, who is based in Invenergy's Littleton, Colo., office, is in Montana this week meeting with landowners who own property at three of the sites.

He discussed the company's Montana plans during an interview Tuesday prior to speaking before the Golden Triangle Pachyderm Club in Conrad.

Johan van't Hoff, the president of Tonbridge Power Inc., and Bob Williams of Montana Alberta Tie Ltd. also spoke at the meeting.

Tonbridge owns Montana Alberta Tie, which is developing a 210-mile, \$150 million transmission line between Great Falls and Lethbridge, Alberta. Invenergy is one of three wind developers that purchased capacity on the proposed line with the intention of constructing wind farms.

Jacobson said Invenergy has separate wind farm projects in the works near Cut Bank, Conrad and Great Falls. He declined to specify where other projects may be developed.

Invenergy is planning to erect three to five additional meteorological towers in the state. It already has three of those towers, which measure wind speed, wind direction and temperatures, in operation in Montana.

A bottleneck in transmission exists near Great Falls and Invenergy has purchased southbound capacity on the MATL line. Jacobson said the company is choosing to be proactive by working with private companies, such as MATL, which are trying to get new transmission lines constructed.

"You have to get into the transmission queue system to start creating momentum," he said.

Invenergy is looking to sell power generated from the state's wind to Montanans as well as customers in Idaho, Nevada and Washington, he said.

Tonbridge Power's van't Hof said his company plans to begin constructing the MATL line in April.

"You have an extraordinary asset, which you should turn into an export industry," he told the Pachyderm crowd.

There's a big shortage in transmission capacity in both the U.S. and Canada, he said.

In the traditional model, new transmission lines are proposed by a utility, he added. The costs are then passed along to ratepayers. MATL, however, is a private company and the cost of constructing the line will be paid by its investors and power generators who purchase transmission space, he said.

The company continues to work with landowners in Montana and Alberta to secure leases where the line would be located, MATL's Williams said.

"It's clear we've missed the mark with certain landowners, so we've taken that feedback into account," he added.

Following complaints from farmers about the location and positioning of the line, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Department of Energy announced in June that they would be conducting an additional review of the proposed transmission line.

The departments are almost finished with the supplemental environmental study, said Tom Ring, an environmental science specialist in the DEQ's facilities citing program.

The study will contain additional information on the cumulative impact of wind farms. It also will provide new localized routing options, Ring said.

The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board last month concluded hearings on the portion of the line that will run through Canada, Williams said. That board will decide whether to approve the project within 90 days of the end of that hearing, he said.